DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 704 EA 024 498

TITLE	Critical Reflections on Curriculum Policy: The SCRE Fellowship Lectures 1992.
INSTITUTION	Scottish Council for Research in Education.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-947833-73-0; SCRE-Pub-114
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	57p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Criticism; *Curriculum Development; *Economic Impact; Educational Change; Educational Innovation; *Educational Planning; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Learning Processes
IDENTIFIERS	*Educational Criticism; *Scotland

ABSTRACT

The Fellowship of the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) recognizes educational researchers whose work has made an outstanding contribution to research, practice, or policy. The first part of this book is the Conferment of the SCRE Fellowship by Professor Gordon Kirk, chairman of SCRE. The second and third parts are the 1992 SCRE Fellowship papers. The title of Sally Brown's paper is "Raising Standards: Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Innovations." Sections include priority for economic criteria and management, national curricula and conflicts of goals, and assumptions about learning. The title of Andrew McPherson's paper is "Critical Reflections on the Howie Report." This is a critique of the report titled: "Upper Secondary Education in Scotland: Report of the Committee to Review Curriculum and Examinations in the Fifth and Sixth Years of Secondary Education in Scotland," published by the Scottish Office Education Department (1992). McPherson argues that the proposals in the Howie report are not only unnecessary, unworkable, and damaging, but also incomplete. The majority of the paper discusses the rights and wrongs of the Howie report but also says something about the history that Howie has overlooked, and reflects on some implications from this. (Contains 28 references.) (RR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED352704

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CURRICULUM POLICY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The SCRE Fellowship Lectures 1992

Sally Brown

Andrew McPherson

EA 024 498

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Wake

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Critical Reflections on Curriculum Policy

The SCRE Fellowship Lectures 1992

Sally Brown ■ Andrew McPherson

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

3

SCRE Publication 114
First Published 1992

ISBN 0 947833 73 0

© The Scottish Council for Research in Education 1992
Copyright of individual papers is retained by the authors.

The views expressed in these papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Scottish Council for Research in Education.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed and bound in Great Britain for the Scottish Council for Research in Education by Alna Limited, East Mains Industrial Estate, Broxburn, West Lothian EH52 5AX

Contents

page

The Conferment of the SCRE Fellowship
Professor Gordon Kirk, Chairman of SCRE 1

Raising Standards: factors influencing the effectiveness of innovations
Professor Sally Brown 7

Critical Reflections on the Howie Report
Professor Andrew McPherson 29

List of Acronyms

ALCES	Association of Lecturers in Colleges of Education in Scotland
CES	Centre for Educational Sociology (University of Edinburgh)
DES	Department of Education and Science (*now DFE*)
DFE	Department for Education (*formerly DES*)
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GCE	General Certificate of Education
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NCC	National Curriculum Council
SCCC	Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum
SCRE	Scottish Council for Research in Education
SCOTVEC	ScottishVocational Education Council
SED	Scottish Education Department (*now SOED*)
SHHD	Scottish Home and Health Department
SOED	Scottish Office Education Department (*formerly SED*)
SYPS	Scottish Young People's Survey
YTS	Youth Training Scheme
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

THE CONFERMENT
9th June 1992

Gordon Kirk, Chairman of The Scottish Council for Research in Education

The Fellowship of the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) is awarded for a distinguished contribution to educational research. To date, there have been five Fellows: the late Professor Philip Vernon; Dr David Walker, formerly Director of SCRE; Professor John Nisbet of Aberdeen; Professor Margaret Clark; and Professor Margaret Sutherland.

In conferring the awards on Professor Sally Brown and Professor Andrew McPherson, I am conscious that I am, of course, acting on behalf of SCRE. But I believe I am also acting on behalf of the whole research and educational community in Scotland. We have tried very hard at SCRE to ensure that the Board was widely representative in the sense that it included colleagues from all of the main agencies and professional organisations in Scotland. In a sense, therefore, SCRE can be said to represent educational opinion in Scotland and to be a channel for the expression of academic and professional esteem. It is therefore legitimate to claim that the award of the Fellowship today is made on behalf of all of us working in research and in education.

The criteria for the award of the Fellowship are clear: it recognises work by a Scot, or a researcher working in Scotland; the research should represent a sustained body of work rather than a single piece of research; it should take the form of disciplined enquiry of various kinds; it should relate to published and publicly accessible work; and, finally, the work should have an impact on research, on practice, or on policy.

Professor Sally Brown and Professor Andrew McPherson are educational researchers of the highest distinction, whose work fully meets these criteria. For over twenty years, in each case, they have carried out research from a Scottish base. They have each produced an enormous output of published work, recognised nationally and internationally. They are each in heavy demand for keynote addresses at conferences at home and abroad. They have each, in their different ways, helped to sharpen the tools of the researchers' trade. By their contributions to television and the press, they have helped to inform as well as to enliven the public discussion of educational issues. They have each demonstrated the researcher's commitment to the pursuit of truth and the publication of findings without fear or favour, even at the expense of making enemies in high places. Their work has, in different ways, had a profound impact on the work of other researchers and on educational practice and policy. Finally, they have helped to stimulate and nurture a professional debate on the most appropriate way of ordering an educational service and have helped to sustain that culture of criticism upon which an effective and responsive educational system depends.

Professor Sally Brown

Following a period of teaching and lecturing, Professor Brown took up an appointment with Stirling University in 1971 and for 15 years thereafter, as Research Fellow and Senior Research Fellow, she established herself as one of Scotland's major researchers. That period was broken by a spell of four years between 1980 and 1984, when she was seconded to the Scottish Education Department (SED). There she was responsible for a £1,000,000 research programme on the Munn and Dunning reforms and was the SED's principal adviser on assessment. From 1986 to 1990, she was Director of SCRE and there initiated a major series of developments through which she revitalised SCRE and restored its national and international reputation. Finally, since 1990, she has been Professor of Education and Head of Department at the University of Stirling.

Professor Brown's research has been extremely varied as is evidenced by the variety of funders - the SED, the Economic and Social Research

Council (ESRC), the Scottish Arts Council, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Scottish Home and Health Department, and the Association of Lecturers in Colleges of Education. However, I am sure we would agree that her principal research interests are as follows:

Assessment: where her work has been concerned to establish valid descriptions of what people can do. For many, Professor Brown became *the* authority on criterion-referenced assessment.

Teaching and learning and the curriculum: how the curriculum is defined and delivered and developed, and how teachers can be supported to make sense of their practice as a prelude to developing it.

The craft knowledge of teachers and its contribution to the professional education of beginning teachers: this work has involved the recognition that, while there is a knowledge base in education which exploits educational research and theoretical understandings, there is an alternative knowledge base deriving from the craft knowledge and insights teachers during their professional lives. Professor Brown has played a leading role in enabling us to understand the importance of that craft knowledge and its contribution to the education of teachers.

In all three areas, Professor Brown's work has had a profound impact: it has enriched our understanding and it has brought about significant changes in educational practice and in educational policy. It is possible to see a clear line of development in Professor Brown's work. From her concern about the skills and competences of the science curriculum, her work moved to the clarification of the understandings which the whole curriculum should seek to cultivate, and to the most appropriate ways of achieving these outcomes through more effective teaching and learning. That work led to a concern about the management of innovation and the involvement of teachers in the revitalisation of pupils' learning. That, in turn, has led to her close research involvement in the ways in which beginning teachers can be helped to acquire the competences necessary for their difficult work. By any standards, her contribution has been a distinguished one and I am pleased to confer on her the Fellowship of SCRE as a mark of the esteem in which she is held by her peers, by researchers, as well as by the wider educational community.

Professor Andrew McPherson

After graduating from Oxford University and spending a few years at Glasgow University, Professor McPherson joined Edinburgh University in 1968. In 1972 he was founder of the Centre for Educational Sociology (CES). In 1976 he became the first winner of the SCRE Silver Medal, an award made in recognition of work by a promising researcher. (In those days, 'young' meant below 35.) Thanks partly to Professor McPherson's initiative and commitment, CES was, in 1987, given the supreme accolade by the ESRC and it became a designated research centre. Finally, in 1989 he was granted a personal chair in Sociology by Edinburgh University.

Professor McPherson's work has been extremely wide-ranging. That is reflected in the variety of sources from which he has in obtained funding—the SED, the ESRC, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), the Training Agency, Regional authorities, as well as charitable foundations. However, I am sure all of us accept that the name of Professor McPherson is synonymous with CES and that, in turn, evokes the Scottish Young People's Survey and the Scottish Education Data Archive. These surveys involve the systematic observation of young people and the impact on them of home, school, higher education and employment. They provide the basis for wide-ranging and powerful analyses of the outcomes of the education system; the demand for higher education; the structure of post-compulsory education; the impact of YTS and TVEI; and the changing expectations of school leavers.

The CES database has become an internationally acclaimed model of pluralistic research—authoritative but accessible to academics, to government officials, and to practitioners. Under Professor McPherson's co-direction, CES became associated with major surveys, and with quantitative and statistical techniques of considerable power and sophistication. Indeed, it is remarkable how frequently the CES publications list includes references to articles on the refinement of statistical techniques and research design. These contributions are evidence of a strong commitment, not simply to the conduct of research, but to improving and enhancing the ways in which research is conducted.

However, to see Professor McPherson's work as being wholly based on quantitative techniques would be a serious misrepresentation. *Tell Them From Me* was based almost entirely on pupils' views of schooling. Moreover, his major publications—*Selections and Survivals, Reconstructions of Secondary Education*, and, most particularly, *Governing Education*—employ the techniques of historical analysis: while taking account of quantitative data, they involve documentary analysis, interviews with key figures in education, and, together, the evidence is exploited to open up for discussion the roots of policy making and the basic assumptions made about schooling and its improvement. These two strands in Professor McPherson's work—the quantitative and the qualitative—are brought together in his most recent work—in the national evaluation of schooling, and of comprehensive education, and in the hugely influential work of CES on school effectiveness.

It would be true to say that Professor McPherson's work has constituted a sustained and wide-ranging critique of schooling and of the educational system. It has been at the heart of the academic and political discussion about schooling in contemporary society. His work would be outstanding for that alone. However, in addition to that, it has explored the limits and possibilities and responsibilities of social enquiry. His has been a contribution of enormous importance and I am pleased, on behalf of SCRE and all of us in the world of research and education, to recognise that contribution by conferring the Fellowship of SCRE upon him now.

RAISING STANDARDS: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INNOVATIONS

Sally Brown

Talk about 'raising standards' is commonplace. We are all in favour of it and know what it means. Whether we all mean the same thing is, however, another question. Because we are all for 'improving education', we tacitly accept that there will always be innovations and the study of innovations, together with the factors influencing their effectiveness, is a constant source of fascination for researchers.

The educational innovations which have come about through the reforming zeal of the Government of the last few years have had some distinctive characteristics. Among other things, they have emphasised analogies from business, given a high priority to economic criteria, assumed that the basic problems are those of management and invested considerable resources in centralised action (particularly the introduction of a national curriculum, manifest in Scotland as the 5 to 14 programme).

My intention in this paper is to look at some of the likely consequences of this approach. I will be especially concerned with the question of how conditions are created to ensure first, that teachers are willing to implement innovations and secondly, that pupils learn.

Priority for economic criteria and management

Over the last decade there has been a pervasive idea throughout the United Kingdom that economic recovery and prosperity are brought about by ensuring that our young people have the 'right' knowledge, skills and attitudes, and that these are brought about by 'good' education and training. This causal equation has been read, of course, in both

directions: as we have slipped deeper into economic recession it has been concluded that young people do *not* have what it takes and that these deficiencies must be laid at the door of those who teach them. And since bucks are always passed, why not blame the teacher educators? For the vast majority of the population, who are neither teachers not teacher educators, it is no doubt comforting to know that this small group can be held responsible for the country's economic decline.

There have been, of course, challenges to this. Ian Stronach (1988), for example, has argued in another SCRE publication (Brown *and* Wake 1988) that 'above all we must question the means/ends, cause/effect assumptions that relate the modern education and training of the individual to broad economic goals' (p56). He points out that messages of this kind are, in general, unbelievable 'after all, attempts to blame a military defeat on indiscipline in the Brownies would be discounted' (p57). He concludes that the persuasiveness of this case lies in its ritualistic aspects: 'it centres on a need to reassure the powerful as much as it seeks to mystify the powerless' (p67).

Simply to apportion blame for educational (and so national, economic) ills is probably not enough for those who are to be reassured; some kind of action to change the 'unsatisfactory' state of affairs has to be seen by them to have been taken. Over the last few years that action has included a concentration on the language of 'raising standards', the assignment of top priority to management matters, a focus on the concept of 'best practice', a forceful introduction of consideration of customers or clients and a central prescription in straightforward terms of the outcomes of education (eg simple lists of competences or attainments). From the nature of these actions, implicit concepts of 'quality' or 'excellence' in education can be inferred.

If we look at this within the Scottish context, it is clear from the recent and extensive initiatives taken by the Scottish Office Education Department in pursuance of quality assurance that the vehicle of performance indicators has been to the fore in the Government's thinking. Such indicators can themselves be taken as an indication of the ways in which 'raising standards' is being interpreted. What is striking is the emphasis on management matters. Within the recently

published performance indicators for primary and secondary school self-evaluation (Scottish Office Education Department 1992a and b), less than 8 per cent of the materials (measured crudely by pages of text) are devoted to teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom; more than 92 per cent of the documents are concerned with policy making, general planning and other management procedures. Schools' management activities outside classrooms may, of course, provide crucial support for teaching and learning; but this is a *service* role and the overwhelmingly dominant position it appears to hold in current thinking about schooling is curious to say the least. It is true, of course, that teachers' responsibilities have become extended to include many more administrative and management duties that in the past—some now spend very little time in contact with pupils—but it seems to me misguided to assume, as does the title of a book by Wilkinson *and* Cave (1987); that *Teaching and Managing [are] Inseparable Activities in Schools*. Whatever the value, in some circumstances, of seeing them as an entity, the danger lies in the relative ease with which a management activity can be prescribed in comparison with the impenetrable problems to be addressed in teaching. I am not surprised that civil servants and central working parties shy away from the latter, but it is only by addressing them that standards will be improved.

The centrality of management matters has also had a major impact on some teachers' thinking about education. This is not surprising given that so many of the prospects for promotion are concerned with management positions, and so many of the criteria on which teachers are held to account for their performance relate to management activities. In addition, when difficult educational issues in need of explication are encountered, management 'solutions' can readily be identified in the knowledge that the language in which they are expressed is eminently acceptable. So, for example, when substantive problems in teaching are to be faced, refuge is found in explanations invoking ideas that there should be 'a school policy on this' or 'more in-service is needed' (though what the policy or staff development might consist of is not at all clear, given that the basic problems have yet to be resolved). In other words, management seems often to fill the role of a displacement activity when

educational thinking about the problem looks as if it might be difficult. In these circumstances, some of the easy slogans of business such as 'managing change is about changing the management' or 'work smarter not harder' have been eagerly taken on; but they tell us nothing about how to improve teaching and learning.

National curricula and conflicts of goals

No matter how preoccupied people are with management matters, however, it does seem likely that most would agree that any campaign to raise standards in education should see better management as a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for improvement. The central concern must be the teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms. A major thrust in this area, by governments in many parts of the world, has been the move towards the specification of national curricula. There are persuasive arguments which claim that such moves are to be welcomed on the basis of giving the same entitlement to learning to all young people, for the opportunities they offer for judgements about and remediation of educational inequalities, for the framework they establish for communication and collaboration among teachers, for the way they facilitate transfer of students between schools and for the means they provide to make schools more accountable to parents and the public. All good stuff but, as John White (1988) has suggested

> There is no virtue in a national curriculum as such. Hitler had a national curriculum and so did Stalin, the basic issue is: what kind of national curriculum?

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of national curricula is that governments aim for ideals. There is a notion of 'good practice' or 'best practice' (as I have heard the goals for the Scottish 5 to 14 programme described) as some terminal paragon of practice which everyone can recognise, understand and emulate. To encourage educators along this path, however, is not just a harmless irrelevance; it diverts from the important kinds of thinking to be done and may well stultify new and creative courses of action.

The problem is that sets of ideal goals for a curriculum may readily be

identified, but the system which maximises the chance of achieving *one* goal will almost certainly not be the best for the others. Indeed, the goals may even be incompatible. At an overarching level, for example, a curriculum designed to fulfil economic criteria is unlikely to serve well the goals of social justice in education or of individual students' personal development. At more specific levels, the same kinds of problems are encountered. In the area of learning difficulties, for example, Her Majesty's Inspectorate in its influential document *The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland* (Scottish Education Department 1978) called for the same curriculum for all pupils (so abandoning the concept of a special curriculum), the avoidance of segregation (into special schools or classes) and the removal of any sense of failure on the part of pupils. In practice, SCRE's own research (Allan, Brown *and* Munn 1991) suggests those goals cannot concurrently be achieved; indeed, it is difficult to see how it is logically possible. Priorities have to be assigned and compromises made; there is no management resolution of this incompatibility and no 'right' way to achieve some mythical 'best practice'.

If the concern is to raise standards, then the notion of 'the curriculum' must recognise that sensible and profitable decision-making by policy makers and practitioners has to be about considering the implications of choosing among alternative courses of action; making those choices; recognising that pursuing some goals must be at the expense of others; and being quite open about that. This awareness of alternatives, self-consciousness of compromises made and a generally questioning approach is one that is able to make the most of findings from research (Brown, S 1991). It brings with it an inevitable sense of uncertainty but it also removes the blast of failure which hits the teacher as he or she realises that the Holy Grail of 'best practice' will not be reached. As my colleague Ray Rutherford-Smith continually reminds our students, 'the truly ignorant are not those who don't know the answers; they are those who don't know the questions'.

The teacher as customer: costs and rewards

An interesting feature of our government's approach to matters of

accountability, educational effectiveness and development planning is the emphasis on the customer or client (usually parents). The treatment of this issue is, however, curiously inconsistent. At one level this inconsistency manifests itself in some eccentric contrasts: parents have the right to choose among schools, but not among curricula (unless they can afford private education for their children) nor (though this may be changing, see Scottish Office Education Department 1992c) between having and not having their children take part in national testing.

At a second level, little thought seems to have been given to the problematic aspects of how schools can take customers' views into account. The facts of the matter are that there will be differences of opinion among parents, any course of action which schools decide on will benefit some children more than others and some parents may have views which cut right across school policies. In the latter category, social justice issues are particularly salient: schools and local authorities are developing policies on anti-racism and anti-sexism but it is by no means clear that the underlying commitments to equality are shared by all, or even most, parents. Clearly there are problems for teachers in how to fulfil the requirements to take on board customers' wishes and, more importantly and less mechanistically, how to give parents and the community the confidence that schools are responsive to their beliefs about and views of education. These problems are intellectually, morally and practically much more complex than those for the manufacturer whose decisions about which customers to please are guided overwhelmingly by profit criteria.

Perhaps the most curious aspect of the customer/client rhetoric, however, is its apparent disregard or unawareness of the idea that *teachers* are customers for centrally developed educational innovations. (I have seen only one instance of schools explicitly identified as a customer—by a Conservative-controlled local authority in England.) Evidence of a well-informed and sensitive selling strategy on the part of government is sparse. There is little indication of an appreciation that teachers will respond to being treated as customers since they do have problems which they want solved and do experience needs which can be satisfied through their work or by reducing some of the demands their work makes on them

(Brown *and* McIntyre 1982). Furthermore, the success or failure of attempts at educational reform depends crucially upon the willingness of these customers to accept new ideas about the purposes and practices of their work and upon their ability to implement them in school and classroom (Inglis *and* McIntyre 1978). Very clearly, most of the Scottish teacher-customers decided not to 'buy' national testing at Primary 4 and Primary 7, despite legislation to force them into purchase.

The notion of the teacher as the customer is, of course, a limited one. It is unlikely that professionally trained and thoughtful teachers will see themselves, first and foremost, as purchasers of the Government's wares. Indeed, the more they are treated as customers, buying and using other people's ideas, the less easy it is for them to define themselves as the planners and initiators of their own teaching, and the more their own creative thinking and aspirations are likely to appear superfluous to their teaching work. Not only is this likely, in the longer term, to deepen dissatisfaction among teachers, it will also deprive schools of an immense amount of potential creative effort.

Although the 5 to 14 Programme has adopted an approach which is not well suited to encouraging teachers to reflect on their own teaching, develop their own ideas and professional roles and be prepared to be accountable for curricula which 'belong' to them, the SOED did experiment with a different model a decade ago. Within the feasibility studies for Standard Grade, experiments in school-based development were undertaken in several curriculum areas. The extent to which these initiatives were in the end school-based varied among the experiments. At one extreme, there was a sense of teachers being exploited by HMI, asked to do extra work with no financial reward and involved in a course which, in one instance, was described as 'gradually filtered from above down' (Munn *and* Morrison 1984, p45). In these cases, it was difficult to see from the subsequent Scottish Examination Board arrangements for Standard Grade what had been learned from the feasibility studies.

One experiment in social and vocational skills, however, was experienced as a truly school-based development, won enthusiastic commitment from teachers as being 'theirs', was perceived as an investigative exercise, resulted in the formation of a professional association, had its

implementation accelerated by a year (unknown in centrally directed innovations) and led to Scottish Examination Board arrangements for the Standard Grade course.. These arrangements leant heavily on 'instances of practices found to be practicable and appropriate in the feasibility studies', reiterated 'the importance of schools doing what suits their pupils, teachers and contexts' and gave 'multiple specific examples' (McIntyre 1985, p103). It seems likely (Munn *and* Morrison 1983) that the action research project (Weir *and* Currie 1985) associated with this course was a major factor in stimulating the valuable thinking and developments. What is surprising is that the SOED seemed oblivious of the success of its own school-based endeavour and returned immediately to the old, well-tried and less than effective, centralist model. That model is, of course, even more dominant today in our 5 to 14 guidelines. The fact that these guidelines are not enacted in the legislation does not mean they are not a national curriculum. The experience of national testing makes it quite clear that were schools to have resisted implementation of the guidelines, regulations on a national curriculum would have been put in place.

In these circumstances, where curriculum innovations are being offered by outsiders, how do teachers make sense of the ideas and use them in their classrooms? The answer to that is likely to depend, first, on how they are held to account for their compliance with the innovations and, secondly, on what pattern there is of personal rewards and costs to them in introducing the changes.

In the recent past, accountability has been largely concerned with teachers complying with administrative arrangements (eg pupil grouping, examinations and tests, disciplinary matters, content of courses) and not very much with thinking about teaching or classroom processes. Now that has been extended to taking responsibility for pupils' learning according to a particular approach with attainment targets; this is very much objectives-based and follows a traditionally conceptualised rational curriculum planning model. Research (eg Brown *and* McIntyre 1988) on teaching, however, has produced little evidence to suggest this reflects the ways in which experienced teachers think about and value their own classroom teaching (though it does mirror much of the

instruction given to student teachers). Teachers construe their classrooms much more in terms of maintaining patterns of desirable pupil activity, taking account of all the conditions impinging on their teaching and making judgements about what actions they should take. Donald McIntyre and I argue elsewhere (Brown *and* McIntyre, in press) that:

> It would be possible to understand better what kinds of changes teachers would find practical to implement if we knew more about how teachers perceive and think about what they do in their own classrooms. Such an approach would recognise that teachers' existing patterns of classroom teaching are highly adapted to the circumstances in which they find themselves and the purposes to which they find they have to give priority.
>
> To have any chance of being perceived as practical, plans for innovation have to take account of what is already being done (particularly what is being done well) in classrooms.

At worst, a new curriculum approach can bring the message that what is already going on, and the way the teacher thinks about what is going on, must be changed and a new mantle adopted. To engender a feeling of being worthless will not promote enthusiasm to innovate. As David Hargreaves (1990) has reminded us, if you strip people naked, their first reaction is not to pull up their socks. Such an extreme may be thought unlikely in relation to the 5 to 14 Programme, but there will be costs for teachers to pay in time and effort as they develop new ideas and procedures for implementing changes which may appear concerned neither with the problems most salient for them, nor the educational aims they regard as most important or pressing. And they may have to relinquish familiar and comfortable classroom practices and autonomy.

A rewarding environment for innovation could be characterised as one which takes explicit account of teachers' immediate concerns and the ways in which they construe their own teaching, and offers clearly articulated ideas and general procedural guidance that individual teachers

can modify to suit their local conditions, teaching styles, classroom problems and educational goals. It would also reward teachers who reflected on their own practice, took initiatives and judged themselves in terms of their professional teaching excellence.

Whatever the diverse nature of costs and rewards in relation to different innovations, for effective implementation the balance has to come down on the rewards side. No system can hold teachers formally accountable for all aspects of education and much has to be left to the teacher's professional sense of responsibility. The successful promotion of change from the centre is not dependent just on the nature and quality of the information and support offered to the classroom teacher by others. It implies a detailed analysis of the innovations themselves and 'market research' among the potential customers. So, for example, to call teachers (even student teachers if we are to go by the latest DES, 1992, list of teaching competences) to account for the ways in which they match tasks to the individual pupils' existing knowledge and capabilities, requires that we are much clearer about how that may be done than is evident in the 5 to 14 documents. Like mothering we are all for it, but whether it is feasible to expect it to be implemented is less obvious, given the confusion about what it means, the vagueness about how it is to be achieved, the variety of conditions under which teachers work and the ways in which they currently construe their teaching.

Essentially, what I have been arguing here is that when economic models for education are taken on board, and emphasis is so clearly put on the customer, the principles have to operate at all levels. Those with responsibility for the central developments have to be just as accountable for their selling strategies and concern for their *teacher*-customers as are teachers for *parent*-customers. This is particularly important because of the crucial role teachers play in determining what happens in our education system.

But what about pupils? The quality of the education they are offered is likely to be judged on what they take from it, particularly what they learn. Any programme of innovation has to consider what that learning should be and the conditions likely to promote it. I am going to look at one narrow aspect of this issue.

Assumptions about learning

Just as there are dangers of construing 'management-and-teaching' as one activity, so there are in regarding 'teaching-and-learning' as an entity. The temptation for those formulating national curricula is to neglect the 'learning'. A common pattern is to provide advice to teachers which makes explicit *what* is to be learned, but the assumptions about *how* learning occurs are almost always covert. These assumptions, of course, have a profound effect upon views about what form of teaching is likely to promote effective learning, what kind of assessment is likely to enhance or damage that learning and how assessment findings should be interpreted. Despite their importance, the implicit theories of how children learn, which are embedded in the proposals for curriculum and assessment reform in the UK, have received much less attention than the political and practical matters of implementation.

Let us turn to what we know about learning in schools. It would be difficult nowadays to find disagreement with the view that the most important determinant of what a pupil learns is what he or she already knows. Teaching and learning are *not* to be construed as a process of delivering knowledge into the empty mind of a learner. On the contrary, pupils construct their own schemes of ideas (schema, schemata) to make sense of their experience and, no matter how misguided those ideas appear to be, they will not be overturned by simply imparting the 'correct' information. If the goal is to achieve progress from a primitive or misconceived state of knowledge, then it is important to recognise that learning is about pupils extending and modifying their schemata as a result of their interactions with their social and physical environment. This constructivist approach, therefore, conceives of learning as a complex and active process, of progress as something which happens within pupils (ie as the growth of ideas) and of the notion of 'delivering' a curriculum as contrary to the reality of pupils' minds.

But what are the implications for the classroom? Curricula and assessments which emphasise activities such as exploration, discussion and application to problems are likely to promote this reconstructive learning process. A focus on questions with convergent answers, an objectives approach and levels-of-attainment models, however, is un-

likely to do so. If we look at the kinds of classroom strategies which promote learning from a constructivist perspective, they look rather different from much of the advice given in national curricula.

Let me take an example in science education (where a high proportion of the research has been concentrated). Driver *and* Oldham (1986) suggest a strategy of:

- providing opportunities for pupils to recognise, discuss and reflect on their existing ideas
- being sensitive to, and valuing, the ideas pupils bring with them to the classroom and the ideas they construct as a result of classroom experiences
- helping pupils to recognise that other people may hold different ideas to their own and encouraging them to evaluate alternatives in the light of evidence
- providing a supporting and accepting learning environment where both pupils and teachers respect the view of others
- giving pupils time to test and evaluate the usefulness of the ideas they generate alongside their teacher's 'scientific' theories.

What would this imply for the assessments which are designed as an integral part of effective learning? From the constructivist's perspective, we would conclude that assessment to support effective learning in science would aim to explore the ideas the pupil already has, monitor how those ideas change, assess the extent to which the pupil recognises and accepts the ideas of others and record how the pupil tests and evaluates their own and others' ideas in the light of evidence. Whatever the quality of the support for learning provided by this approach, however, it would not produce something which could be used to 'measure' pupils against a national scale of levels of attainment. It would not fulfil, for example, the accountability functions for assessment (recording, reporting and evaluation) which the Scottish Office Education Department have in mind for the 5 to 14 Programme (SOED 1991b, pp14-19). It illustrates once more the poverty of the assumption, which has been criticised by so many researchers (eg Broadfoot 1988; Brown, S 1991; Harlen 1990; Simpson 1990), that the same information can be used both for monitoring attainment and improving learning.

In the context of the National Curriculum south of the border, Wynne Harlen (1990) has pointed to the incompatibility between an objectives model of the curriculum and the developmental model emerging from the research. She also contrasted (Harlen 1991) the Science Working Group's report (Department of Education and Science 1988) with the curriculum content in the Statutory Orders (derived from theories without a research base). On the one hand, she referred to statements from the Science Group:

> In their early experiences of the world, children develop ideas which enable them to make sense of things that happen around them. A child brings these informal ideas to the classroom or laboratory and the aim of science education is to adapt and modify these original ideas to give them more explanatory power...
>
> The ideas of young children can be essentially scientific in so far as they fit the available evidence even though they will tend to be limited to concrete observable features and will also be a long way short of formal theories...
>
> There is an essential role for the teacher as enabler in this process: the teacher may interact with the pupil, raise questions, build in appropriate challenges and experiences, and offer new ways of thinking. This way of working also has implications for assessment in that the teacher needs to diagnose learning difficulties and to evaluate the progress pupils are making in order to plan future work. (DES 1988, p7)

On the other hand, she drew attention to the National Curriculum requirement for attainment targets, the dissonance between such targets and the ideas we know children to have, and the apparent preclusion of the application of research on childrens' ideas to the structure of the new curriculum.

In the short term, she concluded that the incompatibility between the 'Science Working Group's Report and the curriculum content was solved when all statements about learning and the teacher's role were shorn from the Orders'. In the longer term, she concluded that some of the 'material was resurrected in the National Curriculum Council's non-

statutory guidance' and that the NCC and others would have to find 'ways of reconciling attention to children's individual ideas and paths of learning with the Statements of Attainment'.

The extent to which governments see such reconciliation as necessary is likely to vary. I was pleasantly surprised to hear the Minister for Education for New Zealand, Dr the Honourable Lockwood Smith, in introducing the draft of their *Science in the National Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1992) quote from the late Roger Osborne (one of the stalwarts of the constructivist movement). This Minister of a New Zealand government, at least as right wing as that of the United Kingdom, illustrated the importance of recognising that children make sense of the world in terms of their experiences, develop their own ideas which might be called 'children's science', and present us with the question of how to provide the conditions to help them make the transition to 'scientists' science'. To achieve that transition he suggested that:

> The whole approach of the curriculum statement is to bring Science into the world of young people, by drawing on their experiences instead of introducing scientific jargon too early ... they will be allowed to develop scientific method progressively by the use of 'fair tests'. If some of their 'fair tests' lead to conclusions which are not entirely correct, teachers will not rush in and tell them they are wrong, but ask them to investigate the reasons for their conclusions. (Speech to the Secondary Principal's Association of New Zealand National Conference in Masterton, 24 April 1992)

This case of a government minister demonstrating a relatively sophisticated understanding of how children learn is not typical of those with responsibilities for national curricula. Certainly in Scotland, and probably elsewhere, most of those responsible for generating curriculum and assessment guidelines would consider themselves neither specialists in learning theory nor qualified in cognitive psychology. Their implicit assumptions about how children learn are likely to be based on personal experience, common sense views and popular myths rather than any systematic study of the area. It is unlikely then that any scrutiny of the

hidden assumptions about learning within the curriculum materials will reveal a clear reproduction of a psychological theory; hybrid views are likely to be the order of the day.

In the national curriculum for England and Wales, Margaret Brown (1991, p28) has argued that in mathematics a behaviourist rather than constructivist model of learning was implied by those at the centre. She characterised this model as one 'within which it is assumed that learning can be described in terms of the acquisition of taught behaviours of various degrees of complexity'. For example, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (1985) in their document *Mathematics from 5 to 16* adopted the behaviourist assumptions of Bloom's *Taxonomy* (Bloom *et al* 1956) which undertook a logical analysis of knowledge into different categories of behaviour 'with the majority of statements [of attainment] relating to "facts" and "skills" and very few to "general strategies (processes)" and "personal qualities"'. Margaret Brown also pointed out that the then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, reinforced this stance by prescribing attainment targets under the headings of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'applications'.

> It was clear that he shared the popular view that most of the teachers' time should be spend practising such knowledge as multiplication tables and such skills as the solving of simultaneous equations, followed in each case by their application to sets of specially conceived textbook problems (Brown, M 1991, p28).

If we turn to the Scottish 5 to 14 guidelines, the thrust for standards has brought with it the identification of attainment targets which list behaviours at five levels in all the curriculum areas. A common scheme of this kind makes profound assumptions about the nature of different kinds of knowledge. Whatever the administrative convenience of such an approach, it is likely to distort or misrepresent the knowledge acquired by pupils, and this will be more so in some areas than others. In my view it is particularly unhelpful in the case of 'expressive arts' where art and design, drama, music and physical education are gathered at five levels under three sets of outcomes: using materials, techniques, skills and media; expressing ideas, thoughts, solutions and feelings; and evaluating

and appreciating. Not only is this scheme of outcomes lacking in coherence, it bears scant resemblance to the ways in which we normally assess 'performance' in real life art, music, theatre and physical activities.

To think about learning as a set of levels, implies the assumption that educational standards can be conceptualised as a hierarchy: a ladder to be climbed, or stages in the high jump. Indeed, external tests, with the function of telling 'teachers and parents about the achievement of individual pupils in relation to nationally agreed and understood standards' (Scottish Office Education Department 1991a, para 11), promise to nail each student to the appropriate point on some national scale. The problem with this is that school learning is much more complex and sophisticated than the linear high jump model suggests, and if educational standards could be represented validly by a scale of this kind, they would not be worth having. (The only kinds of tests which approach these requirements are either culture-free IQ-type instruments, or those with extraordinarily simple and educationally unhelpful things to say.)

Looking at the guidelines' discussion of curriculum and assessment, even when they are explicitly concerned with furthering student learning, they concentrate on what the *teacher* should do or 'deliver', the tasks or activities he or she should undertake and the reinforcement to be offered. There is an assumption that the business of teaching is about the selection of the 'right' stimulus to deliver so that the pupil will respond in the desired way (ie behave appropriately, climb the ladder, learn). This has all the hallmarks and language of an underlying behaviourist approach to learning. It is even more evident among politicians who appear to assume that learning is the acquisition of taught behaviours, emphasise specific objectives relating to knowledge (facts, skills and applications), expect such knowledge to be taught by a transmission style of teaching and call for assessment by short, routine test items. The scene was effectively set in the very first of the *Working Papers* (Scottish Education Department 1989) with statements such as:

> In all aspects of learning, the acquisition of knowledge is necessary to achieve understanding. That body of knowledge must be presented and structured carefully if pupils are to assimilate and recall it and to understand its significance (p3).

There are occasional glimpses of constructivism within the rhetoric of the guidelines. In *Assessment 5 to 14* (Scottish Office Education Department 1991b), for example, there is a recognition that 'teachers should be aware of and should build on the previous experience and present abilities and interests of the different pupils and groups of pupils in the class' (p12). The advice offered, however, is to 'collect from others information about pupils' previous experience' and 'know what the pupils should know or be able to do before starting this work'. There is nothing to encourage the teachers to explore pupils' own schemata, and certainly nothing to guide them in how to do that.

To discuss implicit theories of learning in simple behaviourist versus constructivist terms is, of course, a crude approach. There is a major analytical job to be done to explore the presence of other, possibly hybrid, assumptions about learning in the written materials. We also need to know more about the assumptions teachers make about how children learn. What is interesting about our current situation is that many of the central decision makers (HMI and others) claim to be well versed in and convinced by constructivist logic and evidence, but seem totally unaware of the conflict between that way of thinking and the material in the guidelines.

In conclusion

Let me confess how much I have welcomed education being centre stage in recent years. I well remember expressing regrets during the seventies that politicians seemed unaware of substantive educational matters, and the revival of debate, especially about what goes on in classrooms and including alternative accounts from government, parents, teachers and researchers, is to be relished. The *continuation of the debate* is, however, the crucial issue. The developments must not be regarded as a search for some ideal system or recipe for success which eventually will be found and then all will be well. We have to accept that some of the educational goals we set are incompatible with others and there is no entirely adequate way of resolving the conflict.

I have expressed reservations about adopting the business model for education and putting so many of our eggs in the management basket.

The particular concern is that the debate begins to see management as an end in itself and becomes detached from matters of teaching and learning; that would have a profoundly negative influence on the effectiveness of innovations in raising standards.

Teachers clearly have a central role in raising standards. What they do depends a great deal on what they think, and recognition of that apparently obvious point has led to very considerable research on teachers' thinking throughout the world over the past 15 years (*see* Clark *and* Peterson 1986, for an authoritative review). It is important to look for greater understanding of how teachers think, if only because ultimately it is they who decide whether or not innovations will be implemented in classrooms. In general, the system has to ensure that the 'rewards' for those with responsibility for implementation are more than enough to balance the 'costs', and that the profession has to have a genuine feeling of ownership of the programme rather than a sense of being exploited as hired labour.

I have drawn attention to discrepancies between the assumptions inherent in recent developments in education and what we know about how children learn. Tensions of this kind are common throughout the world. Lorrie Shepard (1991), for example, in a study of 50 eminent measurement specialists in the US, concluded that for about half of them their:

> beliefs, associated with criterion-referenced testing, derive from behaviourist learning theory, which requires sequential mastery of constituent skills and behaviourally explicit testing of each learning step... [and that] the sequential, facts-before-thinking model of learning is contradicted by a substantial body of evidence from cognitive psychology.

It would be misguided, however, to assume that by systematically adopting, say, a constructivist approach to learning there would be no more dilemmas to be faced. We are likely to continue to find that pupils are quite capable of sustaining what teachers regard as misconceptions through thick and thin. Does the teacher then have to resort to a behaviourist approach and insist on scientific truth? If you ask a

researcher that question you will get the usual 'on the one hand ... and on the other hand' response, and that will, no doubt, engender the usual irritation in the policy maker and practitioner who are looking for a straight answer.

REFERENCES

ALLAN, J., BROWN, S. *and* MUNN, P. (1991) *Off the Record: mainstream provision for pupils with non-recorded learning difficulties in primary and secondary schools*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.

BLOOM, B. S. (*ed*) (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: the classification of educational goals*. London: Longman.

BROADFOOT, P. (1988) The national assessment framework and records of achievement. In: TORRANCE (ed) *National Assessment and Testing: a research response*. London: The British Educational Research Association.

BROWN, M. (1991) Attainment targets and children's mathematical learning, Open University Course E271 Curriculum and Learning, Block B Learning Part 3 *Learning in Action*. Milton Keynes: Open University, pp27-32.

BROWN, S. (1991) The influence on policy and practice of research on assessment, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 21, 2, pp231-244.

BROWN, S. *and* McINTYRE, D. (1982) Costs and rewards of innovations: teachers' perspectives. In: OLSON, J. (ed) *Innovation in the Science Curriculum: view from the school*. London: Croom Helm.

BROWN, S. *and* McINTYRE, D. (1988) The professional craft knowledge of teachers, *Scottish Educational Review: Special Issue on the Quality of Teaching*, pp39-47.

BROWN, S. *and* McINTYRE, D. (in press) *Making Sense of Teaching*. Open University Press (to be published in November 1992).

BROWN, S. *and* WAKE, R. (eds) (1988) *Education in Transition: what role for research?* Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.

CLARK, C. M. *and* PETERSON, P. L. (1986) Teachers thought processes. In: WITTROCK, M. C. (ed) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. New York: McMillan.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (1988) *Science for Ages 5 to 16*. London: DES/WO.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (1992) *Reform of Initial Teacher Training: a consultation document*. London: DES (in mimeo).

DRIVER, R. *and* OLDHAM, V. (1986) A constructivist approach to curriculum development in science, *Studies in Science Education*, 13, 105-122.

HARGREAVES, D. (1990) Making schools more effective: the challenge to policy, practice and research, *Scottish Educational Review*, 22, 1, pp5-14.

HARLEN, W. (1990) National Curriculum assessment: increasing the benefit by reducing the burden. In: HUTCHINSON, B. *and* WHITEHOUSE, P. (eds) *Education Research Network of Northern Ireland*. Coleraine: University of Ulster.

HARLEN, W. (1991) *Research Directions at a Time of Change in Curriculum and Assessment*, NICER Occasional Paper No. 6, Belfast: Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research.

HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE (1985) *Mathematics from 5 to 16*. London: HMSO.

INGLIS, W. F. *and* McINTYRE, D. (1978) The teacher's work and its organisational context. In: McINTYRE, D. (ed) *A Critique of the Munn and Dunning Reports*. Stirling Educational Monographs No. 4, Stirling: University of Stirling.

McINTYRE, D. (1985) A school-based development? In: BROWN, S. *and* MUNN, P. (eds) *The Changing Face of Education 14 to 16: curriculum and assessment*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson, pp94-105.

MUNN, P. *and* MORRISON, A. (1983) *Social and Vocational Skills Collaboration: the experience of two pilot schools*. Stirling: University of Stirling (in mimeo).

MUNN, P. *and* MORRISON, A. (1984) *Health Studies Collaboration: follow-up report on four pilot schools*. Stirling: University of Stirling (in mimeo).

NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (1992) *Science in the National Curriculum* (Draft). Wellington: Learning Media, Ministry of Education.

SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1978) *The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1989) *Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: a policy for the 90s*. Working Paper No 1. Edinburgh: SED.

SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1991a) *The Framework for National Testing in Session 1991-92*. Working Paper No 8. Edinburgh: SOED.

SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1991b) *Assessment 5-14*. Edinburgh: SOED.

SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1992a) *Using Performance Indicators in Primary School Self-Evaluation: school development planning support materials*. Edinburgh: SOED.

SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1992b) *Using Performance Indicators in Secondary School Self-Evaluation: school development planning support materials*. Edinburgh: SOED.

SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1992c) *5-14 Development Programme Arrangements for National Testing: a consultation paper by the Scottish Office Education Department*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Office (in mimeo).

SHEPARD, L. A. (1991) Psychometricians' beliefs about learning, *Educational Researcher*, 20, 7, pp2-16.

SIMPSON, M. (1990) Why criterion referenced assessment is unlikely to improve learning, *Curriculum Journal*, 1,2, pp171-183.

STRONACH, I. (1988) Vocationalism and economic recovery: a case against witchcraft. In: BROWN, S. *and* WAKE, R. (eds) *Education in Transition: what role for research?* Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education, pp55-70.

WEIR, D. *and* CURRIE, R. (1985) Social and vocational skills an alternative approach. In: BROWN, S. *and* MUNN, P. (eds) *The Changing Face of Education 14 to 16: curriculum and assessment*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson, pp21-35.

WHITE, J. (1988) Two national curricula—Baker's and Stalin's: towards a liberal alternative, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 36, 3, pp218-231.

WILKINSON *and* CAVE (1987) *Teaching and Managing: inseparable activities in schools*. London: Croom Helm.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE HOWIE REPORT

Andrew McPherson

I am, of course, immensely honoured by the decision of Council to confer this recognition on me, and am very conscious of the significance of the invitation to share in the fellowship of what is one of the oldest councils for educational research in the world, if not the oldest. I am conscious too of how much I owe to the work and support over the years of my colleagues in the Centre for Educational Sociology (CES) and I hope you will understand when I say that I regard this occasion in part as recognition of the contribution of the Centre as a whole, a contribution which, in the case of three individuals, the Council has generously recognised with the award of its Silver Medal, to Alison Kelly, David Raffe and Doug Willms.

Much of the work of the Centre draws on the Scottish Young People's Survey (SYPS) which we conceived in the early 1970s and have run for the past twenty years. As it happens, I learned of the Council's decision to award the Fellowship in February, a matter of days after hearing other, more sombre news. That news was the decision by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) that the cause of educational research in Scotland was better served by its withdrawing support for the SYPS and by spending the money instead in the capital city of another country on a new and more restricted survey: more restricted in terms of design, in terms of questionnaire coverage and, most critically, in terms of the powers of the sponsors to control both access to the data and the analyses that might be conducted.[1] This wilful damage to the human resource-base for educational research in Scotland really defies comprehension and is deeply dispiriting, as are the restrictions under which the new SOED survey will operate.

No doubt Council made its decision to award the Fellowship without regard to these unfortunate events but the effect of the happy accident of timing was immensely to boost morale in CES. That, and the support of many others, has helped us. I am happy to be able to tell you that the Centre has been advised that it retains its intellectual property rights in the SYPS and is planning to continue to run the survey, in Scotland, with the support of the Regional authorities and other sponsors, for the benefit of practitioners and of the educational research community both in Scotland and internationally.

On an occasion like today's, it is also right that I should acknowledge an older and more pervasive debt to the Council. In part it is a debt to individuals, in part a debt to a tradition of research and to the central contribution that has been made to that tradition by the activities of the Council over the years. One of the first things I read in the postgraduate course that introduced me to the sociology of education was the study by my namesake J S Macpherson, *Eleven-Year-Olds Grow Up*.[2] This study of the progress through secondary education of a rising generation born in 1936 was just one product of the immense and pioneering effort that the Council made between the 1920s and the 1960s in the conduct of national surveys of young Scots. As a student, I was immensely impressed by the achievement and possibilities of such work.

Several years later, in Glasgow, Stanley Nisbet, the first incumbent of the Chair of Education in the University, told me about another of the Council's national surveys. This was the survey of all 11,000 or so pupils who took Highers for the first time in 1962, 30 years ago to almost the very day. The survey had been set up through the Council at the instigation of the younger James Drever who at the time held the Chair of Psychology at Edinburgh University. Drever was a member of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education and the survey was designed to test whether there were better ways than Highers of assessing the suitability of pupils for higher education. Stanley Nisbet also introduced me to David Walker who had recently become the first full-time Director of the Council. He made the data from the study available to me and helped me to understand many of the issues involved. The Council also gave me a grant, my first grant, of three thousand pounds, to help me

collect additional data from the 6,000 or so young people in the study who had entered higher education.

What became of the Council's study is another story. Amongst its products was the book that John Powell published on *Selection for University in Scotland*.[3] But what became of the data from the study is part of my story, because the Council, through the good offices of the Depute Director Gerry Pollock and of John Powell himself, allowed us to house the data as the first time point of the data bank that we support in CES. This is the bank through which all the CES national surveys are made available for public use. The key idea here was that the user-friendly survey-analysis packages such as SPSS, that were becoming available in the early 1970s could and should be used, not simply to sustain the professional researcher, but, equally important, to spread and decentralise access to data so as to put a means for a systematic reflection into the hands of practitioners and a wider public.

I remember a long discussion with John Nisbet, Professor of Education at Aberdeen and at the time Chair of the Education Research Board of the then Social Science Research Council. He advised me to set up the data bank as a first step towards our longer term aim. This was the aim of decentralising, not only access to data that had been specified and collected by other people, but access also to the opportunity actually to prescribe the data that would be collected and the questions to be researched. Something like this was achieved in the full-scale programme of collaborative research that we ran for seven years from the mid 1970s. One of the aims of collaborative research was to make it possible for local research needs to be negotiated and met within a framework that made possible comparisons at both local and national levels.[4] A similar emphasis on negotiated research also characterised much of the programme introduced by Bryan Dockrell when he succeeded David Walker as Director of the Council in 1971.

Now, my point here is twofold. The first is that there is, as I say, a pervasive and continuing debt of gratitude that I owe to all the persons whom I have mentioned and to many others. I am delighted that today's occasion gives me the opportunity of acknowledging that debt. Second, and perhaps especially in a small country, biography is also sociology.

What I had encountered in the mid 1960s in Glasgow was a Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) that was something more than just a formal organisation. Indeed its formal organisation was small and it had only just acquired a full-time Director. SCRE was also a focus, a rallying point, an enabler of networks of activity, of joint endeavour, of voluntary contributions to educational research and practice; a broad church of approaches, interests and activities; what John Nisbet, I believe, has aptly characterised with the phrase 'an invisible college'. I count it as my great good fortune that, in a sense, I was admitted to that fellowship of SCRE at the very start of my work, although, at the time, I neither appreciated nor fully understood in quite what it was that I was involved.

That was an understanding that formed more slowly and is still forming and reforming. But I was fortunate also in Glasgow to be introduced to the history of Scottish education in the classes run by Tom Bone, then lecturer in the Education Department and now Principal of Jordanhill College. Tom's book on the history of the Inspectorate was of course a Council publication.[5] Following the path to which Tom had introduced me, I gradually came to realise the extraordinary influence on educational policy and practice that stems from the understanding that a society has of itself, of its own identity and past; and to realise, too, that, in education, we commonly make and remake ourselves in the light of this self-image.[6] I also came to understand that what we think ourselves to be is intimately bound up with the way we organise ourselves to produce that understanding and knowledge. And it turned out, as one looked further into it, that the invisible college of SCRE—that extraordinary configuration of teachers, lecturers, administrators and college and university people, of histories and surveys and practical studies, and of concern for issues that ranged from children's handwriting at one extreme to trends in national intelligence at the other—that this extraordinary configuration itself had a history that was intimately bound up with the conflicts, ambitions and self-image of the nation. The researches of Rosemary Wake, currently Head of Information Services at SCRE, taught me more of this history,[7] and I am still learning from the book that Ian Morris is preparing on the history of the Council.

I shall return later to the invisible college. The only general conclusion I want to draw at this point is this: if, as researchers, we are to be concerned, as we must be concerned, with the quality of our knowing, then we must understand the social institutions, practices and endeavours that make our knowledge possible; that make it possible for us to see the world in a certain way, but that sometimes make it difficult for us to see the world and ourselves in other ways. We must understand, in other words, that our knowledge is both socially organised, and incomplete.

Which brings me to the Howie report, because, of course, the main proposition that Professor Howie has asked us to consider, both in his report[8] and more especially in some of his public addresses,[9] is that we have been the living prisoners of a false knowledge of the world; that our obsession with not being English has locked us into a parochial comparison of standards with our neighbour south of the Border, which in turn has left us unduly complacent about key features of our educational provision, namely its breadth and its accessibility. Both are features where the Scottish system scores over the English but where we are lacking, Howie claims, by the standards of major European competitors.

So Howie has set himself to demythologise the Higher, the 'holy of holies' of Scottish education as it was once called by John Brunton the former Senior Chief Inspector of Schools.[10] And Howie offers us what he calls a 'radical' solution: the three-year Scotbac and the two-year Scotcert with selection into one or the other course at 15 years. It is a solution which, in those heady days before the General Election of 9 April 1992, seemed to answer to a deep-felt need to affirm a cultural identity that was something more positive than simply being not English; and which, at the same time, neatly confounded the massing critics of the anglicising two-year Higher which many people, including myself, thought the Howie Committee had been intended to introduce.[11]

I want to take a different view and to argue that, far from offering us a liberating perspective on our unexamined traditions, Howie is either old wine in new bottles (nothing wrong with that, of course) or just plain wrong; and wrong for several reasons: sometimes because the arguments

contradict themselves; sometimes because the report manifestly fails to understand the evidence and research it deploys; and sometimes because, in its deep ambivalence about things Scottish, it has disregarded the very history, our own history, from which it might have learned. Someone, I forget who, said that a country that ignores its history is doomed to repeat it. There is, I shall suggest, a real sense in which Howie, far from offering the radical solution it purports, represents a traditional solution to a problem that has been framed in a traditional way; that the report diverts attention from more serious problems which have more to do with further education and training than with higher education; and that it will condemn us to repeat the mistakes of the past.

I shall spend the bulk of my time in discussion of the rights and wrongs of Howie. But I shall also say something about the history that Howie has overlooked and, in conclusion, reflect very briefly on some implications of this for the invisible college and for the organisation of research.

Turning then to a discussion of Howie, we can do this under three heads: aims, analysis of the current situation, and solutions.

On the first of these, aims, there is little that needs saying. Few people will dissent, and I certainly do not, from Howie's vision of a well educated, broadly educated and recurrently educated population. I also support Howie's aim of providing a variety of upper-secondary courses underpinned by parity of esteem between academic and vocational components. So there is no fundamental disagreement about aims.

As to the ills of the current system, there is much Howie has got right. We do need to adopt European and global standards and to set our targets accordingly. By these standards we do have a problem of low full-time participation at 16 years. Nevertheless, a majority of pupils does now stay on voluntarily, and this gives us the problem of the mixed-purpose fifth year. The five-subject, fifth-year Highers course is too difficult for the majority of fifth-year pupils, and this does indeed mean that the experience of the breadth that such a course can offer is only for the able minority. The two-term dash is a problem which makes it difficult to address the related problem of spoon-feeding, although there may be changes here with the alternative Highers syllabuses. The 'sticking-plaster' or 'fill-in' role of Scotvec modules is unsatisfactory.

If there is agreement on these symptoms, then there is also agreement on Howie's analysis of causes. Howie suggests two principal causes. The first is the need to smooth the learning gradient from Primary 7 through to Secondary 5 and to get rid of plateaux or wasted time in the late primary or early secondary stages. I personally am agnostic or uninformed on this but am prepared to accept what other people say. And what I have heard so far is that the Howie argument is right and that there is wasted time, though one wonders whether it is wasted for all pupils. The other principal cause is that there is what Howie calls a process of 'sifting and winnowing' in fifth and sixth years, a process of selection and of self-selection in fact. This is absolutely right. However, where I differ from Howie is that I celebrate the fact that we successfully postpone a substantial part of our selection until the post-16 stage. Howie deprecates the postponement of selection. Indeed, effective selection at 15 years into two types of course, Scotbac and Scotcert, is fundamental to Howie's solution. Nevertheless, this part of his analysis is correct: it is deferred selection that causes the problems of the mixed fifth year.

That said, there are two elements in the analysis of the current situation that I think Howie has got wrong. Howie claims that Scots suffer in higher education because they are badly prepared for it. I contest both parts of this claim: both that we prepare our pupils badly and that they suffer in higher education as a result. Second, Howie rejects the argument that our one-plus-one structure of post-compulsory certification in single subjects helps to boost participation rates. I think he is wrong to do so.

Because of these mistakes, Howie offers us a solution in the Scotbac to a problem which does not exist. The Scotbac in my view aims to raise too small a proportion of the age group to too high a level of attainment. In doing this, it would jeopardise rates of participation and progression for the remainder of the age group. If we have problems of preparation, participation and progression, it is among those pupils who are students at the fourth, fifth and sixth deciles of attainment—'middling' students, we might call them. For such students, Howie offers nothing that we are not already capable of achieving in evolutionary mode through the developments in Scotvec modules and through schemes for wider access,

work-based and flexible learning, and for credit accumulation and transfer.

Let us examine in more detail Howie's case for a three-year Scotbac. In fact, he actually never argues this case, but simply asserts that three years are necessary. However, if the case were to be made, it would, I imagine, be made on four grounds. One would be breadth, but we need not delay long over breadth because, if two years are all that is required to produce breadth through Scotcert, then two years at maximum are also sufficient to produce breadth through Scotbac with which, Howie intends, Scotcert should have parity of esteem.[7] A second type of argument would be individual maturation, but the report has nothing to say on this matter, and neither have I. The third and fourth arguments go together and concern respectively the level of attainment that Scotbac should represent and the proportion of the age group that one wishes to attain this level.

To take the age-group argument first. Howie expects some 35% to 40% of the age group eventually to attain Scotbac, but the report is quite clear that:

> This will not ... happen overnight and there will be a transitional period in which rather less than this proportion will elect for Scotbac. (para 6.13)

So Howie intends us to attain this target sometime after the year 2000 and he even conjectures an initial target for Scotbac of only 25% of the age group (6.13), presumably some time around the year 2000. This is to adopt a standard that, far from matching those of our continental competitors, will place us at least a decade behind them. Scotbac is intended to be the main qualification for entry to higher education. West Germany, Denmark and France already raise some 30% to 35% of their pupils to a level of leaving qualification that will lead to entry to higher education. Scotland currently is at 26% of leavers with three or more Highers (3.99). The projected proportion of Scots who will attain higher-education entry qualifications under the current system by passing three or more Highers is 35% for the year 2000. Moreover, it is also projected that, by the year 2000 under present arrangements, some 46% of Scots aged under 21 years will enter higher education.[8] So, if

Scotbac is to be the main route into higher education as Howie intends, it will entail a reduction in opportunities to qualify for higher education by the mainstream school route, and will entail target numbers that place us well behind our European competitors.

As I say, the targets for access are a function of the level of attainment envisaged for Scotbac. Access is to be restricted because the Scotbac level is to be set absurdly and unnecessarily high. Howie's argument here is that, by European standards, the Higher prepares Scottish students poorly for higher education and that their performance suffers in consequence. The problem, however, is that neither the evidence nor the arguments support Howie's assertion. On the contrary, the evidence published by the Department of Education and Science makes it clear that the United Kingdom is among the very best of all advanced societies, first in respect of the proportions of all its young people who complete higher education and, second, in respect of the proportions of all those starting higher education who successfully complete.[13]

Ah, you might say, those figures refer to United Kingdom students. What about Scottish students and specifically those prepared through Highers? Well, here Howie behaves rather strangely, in several respects. First, the report forgets all about its injunctions to compare Scotland with Europe and relies heavily for its evidence on a piece of research that merely makes the comparison between Highers-educated students and GCE-educated students in the Scottish universities. I am referring to the report commissioned by the SOED from Professor Entwistle and colleagues.[14] Even stranger is that Howie disregards the clear statement made on pages 4 and 5 of Professor Entwistle's report that the key question in which Howie was interested could not be answered by the research. I will read part of this question to you:

> ... if less favourable results [in higher education] are reported for Higher grade qualified students, what indications are there that H Grade courses contribute to this and in what way? (my parenthesis)

This question, Professor Entwistle's report says, was 'beyond the scope of the proposed project'. Now, the reason why Professor Entwistle was so cautious was, I imagine, because his research design could not handle

what is known as the selection problem. In comparing Scots and English students we are not comparing like with like. More Scots than English enter higher education and more of higher education in Scotland than in England is provided by the universities. So there is likely to be a wider range of school attainments among Scottish students in higher education than among English students. Moreover, we cannot be sure that English students in Scotland are even a representative sample of all English students in university, and we know that they are not in particular universities and courses. In comparing the performance of Scottish and English students therefore, we must have an adequate control for the prior attainment of students at the point of entry to higher education. Otherwise we risk attributing to the Highers course, effects on student progress in higher education that are really the effects of prior attainment or ability.

Now, this makes the study currently being conducted by Alan Woodley and colleagues at the Open University of critical importance. This is a study of the university performance of Scottish and English students in both Scottish and English universities. It is also a study that has made a serious and probably successful effort to construct a measure of prior attainment that is comparable for Scots and English students. Comparability is achieved by scaling Highers and A Level scores in the light of the percentiles of the age group in Scotland and in England respectively that achieve each score. The study was also funded by the SOED. It is not yet published in final form so we cannot evaluate it. This does not, however, prevent the Howie Committee from using it. Unfortunately, however, the Committee grievously abuses it on the crucial issue. Howie claims that the Open University study shows the following about university attainment:

> ... although those with very good Higher grades did just as well as students with good A Levels, those with moderate and low grades in Higher fared less well than their counterparts with A Levels. (3.44)

When I read this, I realised something was wrong. The Open University study could not possibly have reached this conclusion because there are few, if any, A Level counterparts in university to the Highers student in

university with 'low' (ie below 'moderate') grades. This follows from the fact that we admit a higher proportion of the age group to university in Scotland. When I was able to check with a draft of the Open University report, I found that there had, indeed, been a crucial distortion. What the Open University study concluded was as follows:

> The highest non-completion rates were among those ... whose Highers scores would suggest that they would not have gained entry to university if they had been studying under the A level system.[15]

The whole point about the current Scottish system is that it succeeds in securing entry to higher education for students who would never enter it under a GCE A Level system, and that the vast majority of such students graduate. So Howie represents what is in fact a success story for the Scottish system—that is, producing graduates from pupils who would not get near a university via A levels—as evidence for the failure of the pedagogy of Highers. This is wholly perverse.

As I understand it, the Open University study will show that university success rates are just as high for Highers students at the top percentiles of Scottish school attainment as they are for the A Level students at the top percentiles of English school attainment but that, as one moves down the percentile range, there is a higher Scottish failure rate where comparisons with England are possible (at the lowest points in the percentile range there are, by definition, no GCE A Level students with whom comparison can be made). Overall, some 37% of the gap in failure rates is to be explained by the fact that the Scottish students are on average drawn from lower percentiles of school attainment than the English students.

To summarise this part of the argument: United Kingdom completion rates for students entering higher education are high by European standards, and Scottish and English completion rates differ by only a few percentage points. By European standards, a high proportion of the English age group graduates, and an even higher proportion of the Scottish age group. It is surely evident to everyone, except apparently the Howie Committee itself, that the imposition of a three-year course of preparation for higher education where previously one or at most two

years was necessary, is to impose a solution that is out of all proportion to the extent of the problem. If there is a problem, I suggest, it will be for students in the fourth, fifth and sixth deciles of school attainment and not for those students in the first, second and third deciles for whom the Scotbac is primarily intended.

If the first criticism of Howie is that it is unnecessary and misses the mark, the second is that it is unworkable. Scotbac relies on near-perfect selection at 15 years. It is this that makes possible stable pupil groups, the development of course ethos, and so on (8.9). But perfect selection is impossible. Attainment in Standard Grade will not correlate perfectly with attainment in Scotbac and Scotcert. In selecting pupils for Scotbac, teachers will therefore make errors of inclusion and of exclusion. Errors of inclusion are the more likely, with teachers starting pupils on Scotbac who might eventually fail. I say this for several reasons. First, it is clear that Scotbac will have the higher status; I will explain why later. Second, it will clearly be easier to move down from Scotbac than up from Scotcert. Third, I think that support for the comprehensive tradition is sufficiently strong among teachers for them to resist closing off the ladder of opportunity both at 15 years and earlier in secondary school—indeed, even in late primary—where there will be backwash effects from selection at 15.

I said earlier that, in its concern to demythologise, Howie had ignored the strengths of the Scottish system and ignored its history. Here is a case in point. There is a clear parallel between the Howie proposals and the introduction of the O Grade in 1962. The O Grade was intended as a quasi-group award to be attained by the top one-third of the age group at a minimum level of three subjects. We know what happened to the examination in its first ten years under the pressures of over-presentation. History may well repeat itself. If it does not, and all pupils selected for Scotbac pass Scotbac, this will be a sure sign that many who were excluded from Scotbac at 15 years could in fact have achieved it.

Errors of inclusion could have several consequences. One is that Scotbac standards would have to be relaxed. This would inflate the problem of over-presentation among subsequent cohorts as news of the relaxation of standards fed back to the schools. The alternative is a

higher-than-anticipated Scotbac failure rate. This would in turn have several consequences. One would be repeated years. Scotbac will not dispose of the problem of repeated presentations, but will merely push it forward from sixth year to seventh year. Another consequence would be substantial entry to higher education for the Scotbac failures at 18 or 19 years via schemes for access and credit transfer. Perhaps the worst consequence, however, would be for the Scotcert which would suffer from the low esteem of being a safety-net for failing Scotbac students.

Now, the problem of over-presentation for the O Grade was correctly anticipated by the Chairman and by the Director of SCRE. Douglas McIntosh and David Walker pointed out that, if the O grade were aimed at 33% of the age group, then over half the age group would have to commence the course, given that prognostic indicators of S4 success available at the beginning of S3 were less than perfect.[16] But SED ignored SCRE at the time and the rest is history, a history, as I say, we seem doomed to repeat.

Unnecessary and unworkable, but also damaging; damaging in particular to participation rates. What is, perhaps, most elitist about Howie is the assumption that young people at 15 will start willingly on a three-year course which offers only all-or-nothing success or failure at its conclusion. Of course, the very able and highly confident will take it in their stride. But the great strength of the incremental or little-by-little nature of the Scottish system over the years has been to encourage the not-quite-so-able and the diffident to taste intermediate success and gradually to raise their sights and attainments higher. However, Howie sees this coaxing and nurturing of ambition as unnecessary for the type of Scotbac student he has in mind:

> Young people tend to spend as long in the system as they need in order to pursue a given goal. If the goal is distanced but is perceived as valuable the time commitment could change accordingly. (3.55)

As I say, one of the great strengths of the current system is to encourage young people to see 'a given goal', higher education, as valuable where otherwise they might not have aimed at it. Howie takes it for granted that young people will be easily persuaded to make such decisions at 15 years.

The report nowhere justifies its amateur psychologising about goals. Elsewhere, indeed, it flatly contradicts itself on the matter, as it does on much else. In its discussion of the high failure rates in European universities, it suits the report to argue that the length of course in higher education may be a factor in deterring the young (3.103). So, length of course may deter in Europe at 20 years, but not in Scotland at 15 years. It seems that the young continental is not constructed on the same social and psychological principles as the young Scot.

To make matters worse, Howie in fact has two psychologies for the young Scot: one for the Scotbac student and one for the Scotcert student. Howie assumes a Scotbac student who does not need incremental incentives and who will not be put off by the prospect of a three-year all-or-nothing course. The Scotcert student, however, is a different animal. Here is Howie on Scotcert:

> It [Scotcert] has a major advantage over Scotbac in motivational terms in that by the end of the compulsory period all pupils will have completed half the programme and some (winter leavers) three quarters of the programme: many young people might therefore commit themselves simply by the proximity of the end of the programme and the imminence of an award. (11.27: see also 10.37)

So the Scotcert student is the type of student who was clearly never cut out for the Scotbac. This take us back to the days of the Norwood Committee when pre-determined categories of educational provision were also justified by spurious claims about different pupil psychologies, in this case about grammar-school, technical-school and modern-school mentalities.[17] I would argue that we should be concerned, in particular, at the impact of the selection Howie proposes, not on the young person in the first two or three deciles of attainment or ability, but at its impact on the middling pupils in the fourth, fifth and sixth deciles. We must not discourage them from the highest possible attainment by forcing them prematurely into an all-or-nothing choice where fear of failure outweighs aspiration for success.

Here again, Howie has been let down by his disregard for the history of the system. He professes great concern for what he calls the 'sad

statistics' of pupils who sat two Highers and failed and tried again.[18] In an historical context, however, such pupils reflect, not the failure, but the success of the system. Twenty-seven years ago, in 1965, 18% of school leavers passed one or more Higher. The sad statistics of that era—the pupils who had sat two Highers and failed and were trying again—were therefore located at or around the eighteenth percentile point in the distribution of attainment. But today, pupils at the eighteenth percentile point attain three or more Highers passes in their fifth year thereby qualifying for entry to higher education. These can hardly be called sad statistics. I would argue that it was the individualised and incremental nature of the one-year Higher that made possible the rise in participation and the rise in attainment after 1965 that has so boosted the performance of pupils at or around the eighteenth percentile.[19] Had a two-year Higher been introduced 25 years ago, as SED in fact wanted at the time, participation rates would have stagnated in much the same way as they have stagnated in England and Wales under the GCE A Level system.

Projecting this argument forwards, today's sad statistics, the pupils who study but pass no Highers in fifth year, are currently at or around the thirty-third percentile of attainment. On current SOED projections, pupils at the thirty-third percentile of attainment in the year 2000 will also be passing three or more Highers by the time they leave school.[20] In other words, in a system that is steadily expanding levels of attainment and rates of participation, there will always be a 'ragged edge' of pupils at the borderlines of success. The category of 'the lower attaining pupil' is a shifting target, a socially constructed target, as it has been throughout the twentieth century. Reforms that assume the target is fixed are either destined to be overtaken by events or else to become self-fulfilling prophecies that suppress the expansion of participation, as reform in Scotland did between the two World Wars.

Unnecessary, unworkable, and damaging, but also incomplete; incomplete, especially, in the solutions it canvasses. It really is quite extraordinary that, having decided that the principal cause of difficulty in the fifth year is the learning gradient earlier in secondary school, and having decided to move Standard Grade into the second and third years

of secondary education, the Committee did not ask how many of its goals could be achieved by operating the existing system with the freedom of the extra year won by an S3 Standard Grade. My own view is that a two-year Highers course starting in S4, offered on an individual-subject basis and founded on the recently revised Highers syllabuses could achieve most of what Howie wants but on an evolutionary basis and without the compulsion involved in a three-year group certificate.

Such a Higher would avoid big-bang selection at 15 years. It could start in fourth year for most Highers pupils, but there could also be a fifth year start for pupils who transferred from Scotvec courses, for pupils who combined Highers with Scotvec, and for Highers pupils who wanted to take on more or different Highers subjects. Such a system would allow all Highers pupils to complete a certificated course by 17 years, after only one post-compulsory year. It would allow the standard of the Higher to be raised and would give time for the development of study skills. It would allow a flexible sixth year, either for improving qualifications or for further preparation for higher education. It would therefore retain the incremental one-plus-one post-compulsory structure and would allow participation to continue to expand. It would also encourage breadth in several ways. By making more time available, pupils could achieve more Highers in a wider range of subjects. By making the same Higher grade course available, genuine flexibility of choice would be promoted—there are real doubts whether Howie will produce flexibility if arts-line pupils are not taking the same science courses as science-line pupils, and so on. All of this could be developed within a single-certificate structure which would do more to create parity of esteem between types of course than is possible under the Howie two-track proposals. Indeed, in a single-certificate framework we could envisage increasing overlap and assimilation between the two types of course, mainly through more widespread modularisation.

To summarise so far: the Howie aims are worthy. The current system is not perfect. But Howie exaggerates its defects and undervalues its virtues. The proposed changes would overheat the system quite unnecessarily for the top quarter or so of pupils; would risk being swamped, like the O Grade; would do little that is not happening or could not happen

already under the present structure for the remaining three-quarters or so of pupils; and would damage participation rates.

Professor Howie calls his solution 'radical', by which I suspect he means that it is at odds with virtually all of the submissions made to his Committee. Scotcert is not radical, and what we have in Scotbac are proposals that lie firmly within one strand of the Scottish educational tradition. This is the strand that claims that academic education should be separate from other kinds of education, and is superior. Now, it is perfectly true that the report claims that it wants parity of esteem between Scotbac and Scotcert, and also parity of esteem between the academic and vocational options available within the two types of certificate. I am sorry to say that these claims are implausible.

In fact, implementation of Howie would exacerbate differences in status. First, there are the differences between Scotbac and Scotcert in course length, curriculum and assessment. Second, the report's own argument makes it clear that the higher status attaches to Scotbac. The difference between Scotbac and Scotcert is based,

> not on the old academic/vocational dichotomy, but on a differing level of demand between the two programmes. (11.15)

On the other hand,

> the Committee is of the view that the 'esteem' attached to a particular kind of education is, or ought to be, a function of the demand that it makes upon the student ... (8.40)

These two principles cannot be reconciled with the claim to parity of esteem between Scotbac and Scotcert. If, as Howie asserts, it is level of demand that determines esteem, and if, as Howie also asserts, the demands of Scotbac are greater than those of Scotcert, Scotbac must have the higher esteem. This is the fatal logical contradiction at the heart of the Howie argument, and is indicative of deep confusion in the Committee's thinking and attitudes.

A similar confusion is also apparent in the Committee's treatment of parity of esteem between vocational and academic education. The report makes an effort to observe this principle, but is clearly uncomfortable with the new language of equality. There are frequent falls from

grace, or politically incorrect usage as one might say, where the terms academic and vocational are used in the old way that implies that the academic is superior.[21] Teachers and parents will, I think, sense this ambivalence - an ambivalence, indeed, which is built into the very recommendations for Scotbac and Scotcert - and will guide young people accordingly.

So, far from being radical, Howie does more to continue tradition than to break with it. Indeed, there are close and persuasive historic parallels for Howie. The SED has long wanted to shift the final point of school certification to 18 years. It tried in the 1940s to introduce an A Level, and again in the 1960s when it also turned to a body chaired by a professor from the University of St Andrews.[22] The Labour Government of 1964 rejected that body's recommendations and what eventually emerged was Sixth Year Studies.

However, a more important historic precursor of Howie is, I think, the reorganisation of secondary education under *Circular 44* in 1924.[23] That reorganisation was intended to enshrine the very principle that Howie's Scotbac represents, namely that a satisfactory academic education can be given only to pupils who are separated from others and who constitute a stable group over a number of years. Against virtually universal national opposition, the SED insisted in 1924 that the only form of secondary education that should be offered to pupils was a form which required them to commit themselves to the full-five year course and which therefore, of course, entailed selection at 12 years or thereabouts. At the same time, the SED attempted to kill off the vigorous growth of other forms of secondary provision that had developed over the previous 40 years. This meant killing off the Intermediate Certificate which pupils previously had been able to take at 15 or 16 years on their way to Highers, and also killing off the Higher Grade schools, either by closing them or by converting them into full secondary schools such as Boroughmuir or Hyndland. The intention was to force young people who might have undertaken only two or three years of secondary education away from the secondary schools and courses and down into the Advanced Divisions of the primaries and the Day School Certificate at 14 or 15 years.[24]

The arguments used by the SED at the time were the same that Professor Howie and his report use today: namely that it is uneconomic and inefficient to have children in the system who do not fit the categories of education we provide; to have them doing bits of courses—today, one or two Highers rather than four or five, or, in 1924, to have them doing three years of a course when five years were provided. The counter argument, of course, is that we should celebrate such middling pupils no less than the lad o' pairts; that they represent the future, what I earlier called the ragged edge of expansion; that they are manifestations of an open system in which opportunity is kept open and built up from the bottom, so to speak, year on year, subject on subject—or, if you wanted to put it in contemporary terms, module on module.

There had indeed been a massive expansion of this sort of provision and uptake between the 1880s and the 1920s. With *Circular 44*, SED tried to kill it off by replacing a system in which progression was possible with a system which imposed an irrevocable bipartite division at 12 years. The move outraged virtually all Scottish opinion at the time and was consistently subverted thereafter by both teachers and local authorities who were ready to start far more pupils on secondary courses than the Department wanted. This conflict continued unresolved in effect until the Munn and Dunning reports in the 1970s.[25] Nevertheless, *Circular 44* retarded the expansion of voluntary participation in schooling and gave us 40 years of bipartism, the Advanced Divisions of the inter-War period becoming the junior secondaries of the period after 1945.

In his book *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland*, Robert Anderson has written about the conflicts between two ideals in the Scottish tradition.[26] The open ideal (not his term) wanted to see opportunity kept open, locally available, and not inhibited by the imposition of artificially high standards. The closed ideal valued access and opportunity less than the imposition, in the name of economy and standards, of forms of schooling that involved selection and the sponsorship of elites. The Scottish Advisory Council report on secondary education in 1947, written by that distinguished former vice-chairman of SCRE, Sir James Robertson, attempted to move the system back towards an open model,[27] and comprehensive reorganisation in the

1960s and 1970s eventually achieved this. Howie, I suggest, reverses the direction of change, especially when we place it in the context of other changes in train or in prospect for schools: parental choice, opting out, the reform or abolition of local education authorities, and crude league tables of examination results.

Howie does this by posing as a demythologiser of the Higher. But this is gratuitous. By the mid 1970s educational research had already produced the principal arguments and evidence now used against the Higher by Howie. The interesting questions are: why were these arguments not heeded twenty years ago, and why are they heeded now? Part of the answer, I suggest, lies in the economics of empty places in secondary schools and of full places in higher education.

This brings me, finally, to some comments on the role of research in all of this. First, there is the question of our engagement with our tradition and our past, our view of our own identity and of the ways in which it has been realised, and might be realised, through educational policy and practices. Myths capture all of this. They are expressions of value and purpose, but also theories of how the system works and of how it might be made to work. They are, if you like, a form of social science or social explanation in practice, as well as an expression of purpose and priority. Policy makers use myths to legitimate policies. One of the finest expressions of the myth of the lad o' pairts is quite explicitly written into *Circular 44* which gave us bipartite secondary education. At one level, Howie turns this tactic on its head and legitimates its proposals by asking us to see ourselves and the Higher as the prisoners of tradition. But the past and its lessons are simply dismissed in the report and are not, as they should be, reassessed in the light of research evidence. Howie misses the crucial point that myths as theories may have some truth in them; they are not necessarily wholly false. As I have suggested, however, Howie also appeals, perhaps at a deeper level, to continuities in the Scottish tradition which reserve a distinctive and superior place for academic schooling.

These considerations seem to me to have a number of implications. One is that, if educational research is to be a practical discipline, to

engage with policy and practice, it must be in active dialogue with the past and must encourage critical and scholarly history. Another is that it is inevitable that the makers of policy will attempt to manage and control both the creative and the subversive elements of the research contribution. We see the effects of this management, or mismanagement, at its worst in the abuse of research that Howie represents: for example, in appeals to unpublished research that has not been subject to public scrutiny and which turns out in one case to say the precise opposite of what the report claims. We also see it in the self-contradictions of argument and evidence that litter the report, and only few of which I have had time today to illustrate. More fundamentally, I think, we must question the whole organisation through which Howie collated, assimilated and reproduced the ideas and the products of research in producing its tendentious account.

In talking about organisation, I am talking partly about formal organisation and partly about the social organisation of knowledge, about the health of the research community and of its relations with government. It is no accident that SCRE was founded in 1928, only four years after *Circular 44*. It was born of the collective impatience of teachers, education authorities, directors of education, colleges and universities with the lead that SED was giving on educational issues. SCRE represented a national self-help organisation for the application of research to pressing issues of policy and practice, a sort of alternative Advisory Council, SCCC and Research and Intelligence Unit rolled into one.[25] It is not entirely fanciful to see the period just after the first War as an unstable but formative period in which the heady and volatile gases of the progressive and scientific movements in education, were ignited by the explosion of outrage over *Circular 44*. It was this that led to the formation of SCRE. What we had was akin to a big bang that created a new universe of researchers and practitioners, doing many and various things within different paradigms of research and practice, but sharing the belief that education could be improved by the systematic application and development of knowledge. Although it was changing with the passage of time, that was the invisible college that made it possible for me to begin my research.

And, with the passage of time, the invisible college has continued to change. One reason for change is that government has come to realise the value of research and has come to manage it more actively. Undoubtedly this has brought benefits, but it has also brought dangers, dangers of which, I think, some of the faults in Howie are symptomatic. Government is using research more, not only in its own right but also, through performance indicators and the like, as a tool of public administration. With greater use, greater abuse is also likely. More than ever, we need critical scrutiny, openness, and dialogue; access to research resources and opportunities that have not been restricted by considerations of policy. It is, I believe, still largely a matter of self-help and of doing it for ourselves. SCRE continues to have a vital role in all of this. We must continue to nurture the fellowship of the invisible college, and it is for that reason too, that I value so highly both the Fellowship I have enjoyed for the past three hours and the fellowship I have enjoyed for just three years short of thirty.

ENDNOTES

1. SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (SOED) *Specification for Scottish School Leavers' Destinations Survey 1993 Onward*. (PMA00124.072), SOED, September 1991, (unpublished), paras 11 and 13. The specification allows sponsors unilaterally to veto access to the data at all times and to veto analyses of the data by the contractor for the research.
2. MacPHERSON, J. S. (1958) *Eleven-Year-Olds Grow Up*. London: University of London Press.
3. POWELL, John L. (1973) *Selection for University in Scotland*. London: University of London Press.
4. *Collaborative Research Newsletter* 1-9 (1977-82). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Centre for Educational Sociology; GRAY, J. M., McPHERSON, A. F. *and* RAFFE, D. (1983) *Reconstructions of Secondary Education: theory, myth and practice since the war*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, chapters 2 and 17.

5. BONE, T. R. (1968) *School Inspection in Scotland 1840-1966*. London: University of London Press.

6. McPHERSON, A. F. *and* RAAB, CHARLES D. (1988) *Governing Education: a sociology of policy since 1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

7. WAKE, E. R. (1984) *Events Antecedent to the Founding of the Scottish Council for Research in Education*. MEd thesis. University of Edinburgh.

8. SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1992) *Upper Secondary Education in Scotland: Report of the Committee to Review Curriculum and Examinations in the Fifth and Sixth Years of Secondary Education in Scotland*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

9. See, for example, HOWIE, J., Review of 16-18 in Scotland: European comparisons. Address to the Conference of the Confederation of British Industry, *The 16 - 19 White Paper —Green Light for a Blueprint?* 20 June 1991.

10. McPHERSON *and* RAAB, *op cit*, p360.

11. McPHERSON, A.F. (1992) The Howie Committee on post-compulsory schooling. In: PATERSON, L. *and* McCRONE, D. (eds) *The Scottish Government Yearbook 1992*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, pp114-130.

12. SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1991) Higher education projections for Scotland, *Statistical Bulletin Edn/J1/1991/13*, Table 2.

13. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (DES) (1987) International statistical comparisons in higher education, *Statistical Bulletin* 4/87, Tables 2,3,5 and 7; DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE *International statistical comparisons in higher education: working report*. London: DES (unpublished—January 1991), Tables 2,3,5,6 (ii) and 7.

14. WALL, D., MACAULAY, C., TAIT, H., ENTWISTLE, D. *and* ENTWISTLE, N. (1991) *The Transition from School to Higher Education in Scotland*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Centre for Research on Learning and Instruction.

15. WOODLEY, A., THOMPSON, M. *and* COWAN, J. (1992) *Undergraduate non-completion rates at UK universities: a statistical analysis —first draft*. Milton Keynes: The Institute of Educational Technology of the Open University, chapter 8, p3.

16. McINTOSH, D. M. *and* WALKER, D. A. (1970) The O-grade of the Scottish Certificate of Education, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 40, 2, pp179-99.

17. BOARD OF EDUCATION (1943) *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools: report of the Committee of the Secondary Schools Examination Council*. London: HMSO.

18. Trying to steer a difficult course, *Scotsman*, 13 March 1991.

19. McPHERSON, A. F., RAFFE, D. *and* ROBERTSON, C. (1990) *Highers and Higher Education*. Edinburgh: Association of University Teachers (Scotland).

20. SCOTTISH OFFICE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT *Higher Education Projections for Scotland (1991), op cit*, Table 1.

21. For example, SOED (1992) *op cit*, paras 10.71 to 10.73.

22. SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1960) *The Post-Fourth Year Examination Structure in Scotland: a report of a special committee of the Advisory Council on Education in Scotland*. Cmnd 1068. Edinburgh: HMSO.

23. SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1921) *Circular 44*. London: HMSO.

24. WADE, N. (1939) *Post-Primary Education in the Primary Schools of Scotland 1872-1936*. London: University of London Press.

25. SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1977) *Assessment for All: report of the Committee to Review Assessment in the Third and Fourth Years of Secondary Education in Scotland*. Edinburgh: HMSO. SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1977) *The Structure of the Curriculum in the Third and Fourth Years of the Scottish Secondary School*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

26. ANDERSON, R. (1983) *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: schools and universities*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

27. SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1947) *Secondary Education: a report of the Advisory Council on Education in Scotland*. Cmd 7005. Edinburgh: HMSO.

28. WAKE, *op cit*; YOUNG, J. (1986) *The Advisory Council on Education in Scotland 1920-61* Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Edinburgh. The SCCC is the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum. The Research and Intelligence Unit is that part of the SOED which administers the Department's funded external research.

SCRE Publication 114
ISBN 0 947833 73 0

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CURRICULUM POLICY

THE SCRE FELLOWSHIP LECTURES 1992

The SCRE Fellowship recognises educational researchers whose work has made an outstanding contribution to research, practice or policy. In 1992 the Fellowships were awarded to two of Scotland's leading researchers **Sally Brown and Andrew McPherson.**

In their fellowship lectures the SCRE Fellows present clearly argued and stimulating critiques of current policy initiatives affecting curriculum and assessment in primary and secondary education. Discussing what influences the effectiveness of innovations, Sally Brown asks, for example, 'what about teachers as customers? what about what we know about how we learn?' while Andrew McPherson argues that the proposals in the Howie report are 'unnecessary, unworkable, and damaging, but also incomplete'.

Individually, the papers will assist with the process of planning and implementing innovations. Together they constitute a strong case for why educational research is needed by policymakers and by society. Far from being a retrospective, marginal, ivory tower occupation, critical reflection grounded in research can contribute substantially to current and future educational debates and practice.

Sally Brown: Improving standards in education
– what factors influence the effectiveness of innovations?
Andrew McPherson: Critical reflections on the Howie Report

Professor Sally Brown is Professor of Education at Stirling University.
Professor Andrew McPherson is founder and co-director of the Centre for Educational Sociology at Edinburgh University.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Scottish Council for Research in Education